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SUBJECT: South Sudan: Bona Malwal: Straddling Two Sides

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. On January 19, Embassy officials and Commissioners from the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) met in Juba with GOSS Presidential Advisor Bona Malwal. The commissioners questioned Malwal on the CPA, religious freedom, sanctions, and Darfur. Malwal was harshly critical of both the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), and said the CPA was designed to fail. However, embedded within this criticism were positions that both sides could support. End Summary.

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CPA Intended to Fail  
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¶2. (U) Malwal said that the CPA was intended to be too complicated and rigid to implement -- that it was not made to bring democracy, but rather to share power between two dictators. Disappointed in international support for this "peace at any price," Malwal believes the people of Sudan must now pay that price. Malwal did say that Salva Kiir is more democratic, which gives him some hope. However, he cited Abyei as an example of the CPA's failings. He also told the USCIRF commissioners that the biggest shortcoming of the CPA was the fact it did not address slavery.

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Religious Freedom  
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¶3. (U) Malwal explained that he is now completely free to practice his religion. The fact that he is not allowed to drink in Khartoum is a civil liberties issue and not a religious issue, despite the fact that it has religious justifications. The remaining religious freedom issues are seizures of some church land and the continuation of the 1960s-era law banning missionaries. (Note: This law has been modified to allow foreign churches to register as NGOs to deliver aid, but they still cannot practice missionary work. End Note.)

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A New Take On The Party Line  
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¶4. (U) While Malwal harshly criticized the government, explaining the situation in Sudan will not improve as long as the current regime is in power. That is why he is forming his own party to contest the next elections. However, he thought that sanctions should be lifted, not as a reward, but because sanctions do not work. He explained that this government has shown it can withstand sanctions and that only the common man is affected. He also thought that the USG should cooperate more on

Darfur. The government wants out, he said, but cannot do it without the U.S. Unfortunately, Khartoum is too defensive to accept help as long as the relationship is confrontational.

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Comment  
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15. (SBU) While it was surprising to hear a member of the Government of National Unity speak so openly and negatively about both the NCP and SPLA, his subtext closely followed NCP positions. He dislikes and distrusts the NCP, but he still thinks the U.S. should lift sanctions and stop pressuring on Darfur. His discussion on the ban on missionaries, and his anti-slavery statement also shows that he knew his audience. Considered by some a traitor for embracing the North, there are indications that Salva Kiir has welcomed Malwal and considers him a close advisor. Malwal's positive comments on Kiir would seem to support that, but it is more likely that Malwal is playing a careful balancing game between the north and south.

16. Bio Note: Bona Malwal is a Malwal Dinka from the same area of North Bahr Al Ghazal as Salva Kiir. Malwal has a long history of cooperation with the North. In the early 1960's, the government sent him to the United States to study journalism, and he later served as Minister of Information in the Nimeiri government before being forced out over Sharia laws and the break with the South. Living in exile in England for most of the 80's and 90's, he reconciled with the current government in the late 90's, returning to Khartoum to publish a newspaper and serve as a government press advisor.

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